



Shakespeare For White Trash: The Merchant of Venice

Classic literature translated into Modern English by Crad Kilodney

October 7, 2010 – Author’s Note:

“Shakespeare For White Trash” is a series of condensed rewrites designed to make Shakespeare understandable and enjoyable to those who have little or no knowledge of him. The plots and characters are unchanged, but everything else has been radically restyled. Read my versions and you’ll be a Shakespeare fan forever!

These plays are intended to be performed, as well as read.

Main Characters

Antonio — the merchant of Venice

Bassanio — his friend

Gratiano — another friend

Salarino and Solanio — friends of Antonio and Bassanio

Shylock — rich Jewish moneylender

Jessica — his daughter

Lorenzo — friend of Antonio and Bassanio, and Jessica’s sweetheart

Tubal — another rich Jew

Duke of Venice

Prince of Morocco

Prince of Arragon

Portia — wealthy heiress

Nerissa — her waiting-maid

Launcelot Gobbo — servant of Shylock (also described as a clown in the original)

Old Gobbo — his father

Leonardo — Bassanio's servant

Balthazar and Stephano — servants of Portia

Salerio — a messenger

Magnificoes — high-ranking nobles and officers of the court

Singer

Gist of the story: Antonio, a merchant, borrows a large sum of money from the Jewish moneylender Shylock, who hates him. Shylock won't charge interest on the loan. Instead, Antonio must guarantee the loan with a pound of his own flesh. Antonio signs the contract because he is borrowing the money to help his friend Bassanio, who seeks to marry the wealthy heiress Portia. Antonio is confident that his ships will return in plenty of time to provide him with the money to pay back the loan. However, the ships fail to return on time, and he can't repay the loan. Now Shylock demands his pound of flesh, and he drags Antonio into court to enforce the contract. Portia disguises herself as a lawyer and comes to Venice to save Antonio's life. (Taken at face value, this play is so anti-Semitic, no modern playwright could get away with it. Nevertheless, it remains one of Shakespeare's most popular plays. And now you know where the phrase "a pound of flesh" comes from.)

Act 1, Scene 1. *A street in Venice. Antonio, Salarino, and Solanio come in.*

Antonio: I don't know what's wrong with me. I feel depressed all the time. Maybe I've got a bipolar disorder or something.

Salarino: Aw, you're just worried about your ships and your cargoes.

Solanio: Having ships is a risky business. I wouldn't want to be in shipping. There are so many bad things that can happen. There's hurricanes, waterspouts, tidal waves, whirlpools—

Salarino: And sometimes there's no wind at all, and the ships can't move, and everyone's burning up from the heat and their brains are getting fried by ultraviolet rays—

Solanio: The worst kind! And then there are hidden dangers like coral reefs and sandbars and undercurrents that will drag a ship into the rocks and smash it to pieces—

Salarino: And the poor sailors will get eaten by sharks or stung by stingrays. That's in the shallow waters, of course.

Solanio: Yes, indeed. And in the deep water you have sperm whales that will attack a ship for no reason. And there are also giant squids, and they've got these huge, long tentacles that reach up and take hold of a ship and pull it under, and the suckers will rip men to pieces—

Salarino: And don't forget the sea serpents! The devil's monsters! Why, they've been known to terrorize a coast for a hundred years, and no ship can put to sea at all — like that one in Norway, was it?

Solanio: Sweden, I believe.

Salarino: You're thinking of another one.

Solanio: And pirates! What can you do about pirates? They're ready to pounce on any ship—

Salarino: Like yours.

Solanio: And sometimes a crew will mutiny and steal everything—

Salarino: Or else go crazy and go on a rampage and kill all the officers.

Solanio: Which is sometimes caused by ergotism. That's a poisonous mold in the food—

Salarino: And diseases! Sailors can get scurvy or beri-beri. And God knows what sort of contagious disease can find its way onto a ship—

Solanio: Plague, man! Bubonic plague! It's spread by rats! Why, you could have a cargo hold full of plague rats and not realize it until your sailors are spouting blood from their sores and falling dead—

Salarino: Or the plague could be in the port! You get there and find there's a quarantine, and you can't dock. And if you go somewhere else, they'll know where you're coming from, and they won't let you in there either, and there you are, sailing forever, hopelessly, and all your goods going to rot.

Solanio: There goes your whole investment.

Salarino: Yes, kiss it goodbye.

Solanio: And there are certain places where sailors are lured to their deaths by sirens that sing to them and drive them mad—

Salarino: And there are giant rocks that wait for a ship to go between them, and then they come together suddenly and crush it—

Solanio: Yes, yes. It's common knowledge. And, of course, there are everyday problems with the unions — the Seafarers' Union and the Longshoremen's Union. They're all crooked—

Salarino: And the goods are always getting stolen or damaged. Why, it's a miracle if you can get anything from one place to another in one piece.

Solanio: And then you have to deal with the insurance companies, and they're all bastards, and they'll find something in the find print, and you won't get a penny.

Salarino: It's a terrible business to be in — shipping goods. You could get wiped out financially at any moment. And then you're on the street begging for a crust of bread.

Solanio: It happens to lots of people.

Salarino: Ain't it the truth.

(A pause here.)

Antonio: Gee, thanks a lot. That really makes me feel better.

Solanio: What are friends for?

Antonio: Actually, I wasn't worried about business. Business has been pretty good.

Salarino: Then what are you depressed about — a woman?

Antonio: No. Nothing specific.

Salarino: Antonio, it's all in your mind. If you keep telling yourself you're unhappy, then you'll stay unhappy.

Solanio: Right. So do the opposite. Just tell yourself you're happy. Just say, "I'm happy, happy, happy!" *(Body gestures for emphasis)*

Salarino: Yes! That's what we do! "We're happy, happy, happy!" *(Body gestures for emphasis)* Even if you're only faking it, so what?

Antonio *(Claps them on the shoulders in turn, which tells the audience who is who)*: Salarino... Solanio... You're both my good friends.

Salarino and Solanio: Thank you.

Antonio: And you're both fucking nuts.

Salarino and Solanio: Thank you.

(Bassanio, Lorenzo, and Gratiano come in.)

Bassanio: Hi, guys!

Solanio: Hey, look who's here! Bassanio! Gratiano! Lorenzo!

Salarino: Now that the wise men are here, we nuts will be on our way. Besides, we have some business of our own to take care of. *(To Solanio)* Don't we?

Solanio: If they haven't stood us up.

Bassanio *(To Salarino and Solanio)*: Hey, we hardly ever see you guys any more. We gotta get together and have some fun.

Salarino: For sure. We'll go see some strippers.

Gratiano and Lorenzo: Yeah! Yeah!

(Salarino and Solanio leave.)

Lorenzo: Bassanio was looking for you, and we just tagged along.

Gratiano: What's the matter, Antonio? You look down.

Antonio: That's my life, Gratiano. Some people get to be happy, and others don't.

Gratiano: Aw, bullshit. It's all in your mind.

Antonio: That's what Salarino said.

Gratiano: It's true. Listen. I'm your friend, right? I'll tell you this for your own good. People who are too serious end up badly. And the worst ones are the ones who are always silent. They're like statues — very rigid. Never say a word. And people think they must be, like, deep philosophers or something, because they're so silent and serious. But the truth is — they're just fucked-up neurotics.

Lorenzo: Like all those wankers in the financial district.

Gratiano: Right. Anyway, Lorenzo and I have to go. — Bassanio, we're seeing you at dinner, right?

Bassanio: Right. Later.

(Gratiano and Lorenzo leave.)

Antonio: So what do you think? Is he right?

Bassanio: Gratiano likes to hear himself talk. If he ever says anything sensible, it's by accident.

Antonio: Okay, so you wanted to tell me about some girl. You were going on a trip to see her or something? What's the story?

Bassanio: Okay, well — so, like, here it is. Uh, you know, I've been a big spender, and I've run up a lot of debts. I owe you more than anyone else. And I intend to pay off all my debts, believe me. And if this trip works out, I'll be able to do that. It's just that I'm going to need, uh—

Antonio: Yeah, yeah, you need some money. Okay, fine. I'd never say no to you. So what about this girl?

Bassanio: Her name is Portia. She lives in Belmont. She's very hot and very rich. I'm going to try to marry her. And I think I can because I think she likes me. But there are a lot of other guys who are also after her. And these are guys with money and status. You know — nobles. There's no way I can compete with them unless I have some money for presents and maybe some new clothes. I've got to make a good impression. If I can just get my foot in the door, I think I can win her over.

Antonio: That sounds pretty good. It's a risk, but it's worth it. Unfortunately, I'm strapped for cash at the moment. All my money's tied up in my fleet. I have to wait for my ships to come in, literally. But my credit is good. If you need to buy some stuff, buy it in my name and charge it to me. In the meantime, see if you can get a loan, with me as the guarantor. I'll see if I can line up some kind of business loan or personal loan. I should be able to do that. People know me.

Bassanio: Boy, that would be great!

(They leave.)

Act 1, Scene 2. In Belmont. Portia and Nerissa come in.

Portia: Oh, Nerissa, I'm so tired of this big, complicated world.

Nerissa: Well, I guess that's what happens when you're extremely rich and beautiful. It's just as bad as being poor and ugly. Probably the only happy people are the average ones right in the middle.

Portia: I think you're right. But what can I do about it? My father left me all this money, but in his will he took away my freedom to choose a husband. He left it up to his weird game with the three chests.

Nerissa (Speaking directly to the audience): Here's the situation. Portia's father was a very devout man, but somewhat — flaky. He had these three chests made — one of gold, one of silver, and one of lead. Anyone who wants to marry Portia has to pick one of the three chests. One of them is the lucky one, and the other two are losers. Whoever picks the right chest gets to marry Portia, and she has no say in the matter. And everyone who picks one of the wrong chests is not allowed to propose to any other women for the rest of his life. The old man figured that whoever was smart enough or virtuous enough to pick the right chest had to be the right man for her. Is that dumb or what? I don't know. Maybe the old man was a lot shrewder than anyone gave him credit for. Anyway, hang on, and we'll see how this turns out. *(To Portia)* So, tell me, madam, do you like any of the men who are interested in you?

Portia: Oh, there are so many I can hardly keep track. Run through the list for me.

Nerissa: There's the prince from Naples.

Portia: Oh, yes, the horse-lover. He lives for his horses. He thinks it's a big deal that he can shoe a horse just like a blacksmith. — Nay!

Nerissa: How about Count Palatine?

Portia (Frowning): Count Sourpuss! No sense of humour.

Nerissa: Then there's the French lord, Monsieur le Bon.

Portia: What a show-off! *(Mockingly)* "Ooh, I'm such a good dancer. Watch me!...Ooh, I'm so good with a sword. Watch me!"

Nerissa: How about the English baron, Falconbridge?

Portia: Oh, he's not too bad. But we can't speak each other's languages, so what's the point? And he dresses weird. Everything is totally mismatched. Better he should find some English fashion designer.

Nerissa: What about the Scottish lord?

Portia: A wimp. The Englishman and the Frenchman both insulted him, and he just stood there and took it. Frankly, I suspect he's gay.

Nerissa: And there was that German fellow, the nephew of the Duke of Saxony.

Portia: The guy's an alcoholic. He's absolutely dreadful.

Nerissa: Remember that if any one of them picks the right chest, you're stuck with him.

Portia: Oh, God help me.

Nerissa: It's okay, madam. The good news is that all of them have decided not to play the game. They're going home.

Portia: Tell them to have a nice trip and forget to write.

Nerissa: Do you remember that nice young man from Venice? He came to visit with the Marquess of Montferrat when your father was still alive.

Portia: Mmm....Yes. Bassanio. I remember him. I liked him.

Nerissa: He was a hunk, wasn't he? Now, that's the sort of man I'd like to see you end up with.

Portia: Yes. I don't think I'd mind that at all.

(A Servant comes in.)

Servant: Madam, the four gentlemen wish to say goodbye. And there's a messenger from the Prince of Morocco who says the Prince will be arriving tonight.

Portia: Morocco? Oh, hell. A darkie. — Come on, Nerissa. *(To Servant)* All right, lead the way. — It's like a revolving door around here. — Hello. Goodbye. Hello. Goodbye.

(They leave.)

Act 1, Scene 3. Bassanio and Shylock come in.

Bassanio: Shylock, lend me three thousand ducats for three months.

Shylock: Mmm. For three months? Mmm.

Bassanio: Antonio will guarantee it.

Shylock: Oh! Antonio will guarantee it.

Bassanio: For sure. Come on. You can do this. You're loaded.

Antonio: Yes. Well...Antonio has several merchant ships. He's doing commerce in many places. Of course, it's a risky business. Plenty of bad things can happen to ships. But, generally, I'd say he's creditworthy. All right. I'll lend you three thousand ducats for three months if he guarantees it. I'll have to discuss it with him, of course. He'd be the one signing for it.

Bassanio: Sure. Come for dinner, and you can talk to him.

Shylock: Oh. Dinner. No, I don't think so. You people eat pork. I can't even stand the smell of it. After all — I'm a Jew.

(Antonio comes in.)

Bassanio: Here he is now. This is Antonio.

Shylock (Aside to the audience): Oh, this guy! I know this bastard! He's a fucking anti-Semite. And he fucks up my moneylending business by lending money at no interest. Boy, I hate Christians, but him especially. Over in the business district he's always slandering me — calling me a loan shark. And now he's coming to me for a loan? Fine. This is my chance to get even with this — this Gentile, this goy, this pork-eater.

Bassanio: Hey, are you listening?

Shylock: Yes, yes. I'm just thinking about how much cash I have. I may not have three thousand right this very minute, but I can certainly get it from my friend Tubal. He's another Jewish businessman. — Three months, did you say? *(To Antonio)* Oh, hello, Signor Antonio. We were just talking about you and your excellent shipping business.

Antonio: Hello, Shylock. You know I never pay interest or charge interest to others, but for Bassanio's sake, I'm willing to make an exception.

Shylock: And you'd like me to lend him — that is, lend you — three thousand ducats for three months. Is that it?

Antonio: Right.

Shylock: Yes. Fine. Hmm. You know, this is ironic, because you've slandered me many times for the way I do business, and now you want my help.

Antonio: Hey, look, I didn't expect to be treated like a friend. You can treat me like an enemy if you want. We don't have to pretend to like each other. All I care about is the loan.

Shylock: I'm willing to overlook all the times you offended me. After all, I'm a Jew. My people are used to being persecuted.

Antonio: Here we go.

Shylock: Relax. Did I say I wouldn't lend you the money? I'll lend you the money. And I'm willing to be friendly. In fact, I'll lend you the money and not charge you any interest at all.

Antonio: Wow! You'd do that for me?

Shylock: Of course. We'll go to a notary and do some paperwork, and you'll get your loan. And just for fun — purely as a joke — we'll put a special clause into the contract.

Antonio: What sort of clause?

Shylock: If you don't repay the loan on time, I get to cut a pound of flesh out of your body. Right here — around the heart.

(A pause.)

Antonio: You're joking, right?

Shylock: Well, it's like a joke, yes. But it'll still be in the contract. And then three months from now, when you've repaid the loan, we can laugh about it like friends. I mean, you're not really worried about being able to repay, are you?

Antonio: No, no, of course, not. When my ships come in, I'll have plenty of dough.

Shylock: Of course.

Antonio: All right. It's a deal. — You know, for a Jew, you're a pretty good sport.

Bassanio: Uh, wait a sec, bro. I don't know about this. I wouldn't want anything bad to happen to you.

Antonio: Aw, don't worry. My ships will be back in two months. That's a month before the loan is due.

Shylock: Bassanio, do you think I really want a pound of Antonio's flesh? What good would it be to me? It would have no commercial value. A pound of beef would be worth more.

Antonio: Yeah. Good point. Okay, I'll sign the contract.

Shylock: Good. You go to the notary and tell him the terms of the contract and let him write it up. I'll go get you your three thousand ducats.

Antonio: Okay, good buddy! (*Shylock leaves.*) Gee, he's not the bad guy I thought he was. He could even be a Christian.

Bassanio: I have a bad feeling about this.

Antonio: Don't worry. Everything will be fine. Come on.

(*They leave.*)

Act 2, Scene 1. *A flourish of trumpets. The Prince of Morocco comes in, accompanied by his attendants, similarly dressed. He's dark-skinned. Then Portia, Nerissa, and their attendants come in.*

Morocco: Don't be prejudiced against me because I'm dark. In Morocco I'm considered quite handsome. I could have any Moroccan woman I wanted.

Portia: I'm sure you could. Of course, beauty is entirely subjective — and it's not necessarily the most important factor in choosing a husband or wife. And in my case, it doesn't matter at all, since I don't get to choose my husband anyway. You have to pass my father's test and pick the right chest. If it weren't for that, I believe I could say truthfully that you would have as good a chance to marry me as any of the suitors I've met so far.

Morocco: I appreciate that. Okay, I'm willing to try my luck with the chests. Of course, if there were some other way I could win you without having to depend on luck. (*Portia shakes her head.*) I'd take on anyone with a sword and win. I'd even take on a bear or a lion.

Portia: Doesn't matter.

(Morocco falls to his knees and grabs her wrists.)

Morocco: We don't have white babes like you in Morocco! I hate Moroccan women! They're ugly! But you're a goddess! I'd kill my mother for you! I deserve a better chance than one out of three! Give me a hint!

Portia: No, I can't do that, Prince. I have to follow my father's rules. It has to be done fairly. Of course, no one's forcing you to do this. You can change your mind and go home. After all, as I explained to you earlier, if you pick a wrong chest, you can't propose to any other woman for the rest of your life.

Morocco (Aside to the audience): Which is, of course, totally unenforceable. I mean, what are they going to do — hire a private detective to follow me around for the rest of my life to make sure I don't propose to anyone? I know a countess in Sweden *(Makes a vulgar gesture signifying big breasts)*.

Morocco (To Portia): Fine. I agree to those terms.

Portia: And if you make a wrong choice, you can't tell anyone which chest you picked.

Morocco: I wouldn't anyway.

Portia: Good. But we'll have dinner first, and afterwards you can try your luck.

Morocco: And then I'll be either be the happiest or the unhappiest man in the world.

(Another trumpet flourish, and they leave.)

Act 2, Scene 2. Launcelot Gobbo, servant of Shylock, comes in.

Launcelot: What am I going to do? That bastard Shylock is so mean to me. I ought to quit and find someone else to work for. But a good servant isn't supposed to quit. I'd feel guilty about that. But the devil is telling me to run away. Imagine that. I work for a devil, and the devil is telling me to leave him. Is that logical? If the Jew devil is so awful that even the real devil can't stand him, he must be, like, the worst fucking devil in the world. I think that settles it. I'm going to leave him.

(Old Gobbo, Launcelot's father, comes in with a basket. He's almost totally blind.)

Gobbo: Excuse me, young man. I'm looking for the house of Shylock, the Jew.

Launcelot (Aside to the audience): It's my own father! He doesn't know who I am because he's almost totally blind. I think I'll have some fun with him.

Gobbo: Hey, I want to know which way to the Jew's house.

Launcelot: Right. No problem. Here's how you go. Go down the block and turn left at the corner, then go straight for one block, then right for two blocks, then left for one block, then look for the tree, go right, and then left to the hitching post in front of the shop with the big window, then turn right, and it's the third house — no, the fourth house — from the corner diagonally opposite.

Gobbo: What the hell? Say, listen, do you know if a young man named Launcelot still lives with him?

Launcelot: You mean Master Launcelot?

Gobbo: No, he's not a master. He's a servant. He's the son of a poor man — but an honest one, I can assure you.

Launcelot: Well, I don't know anything about his father, but he's Master Launcelot.

Gobbo: No, not Master Launcelot — just regular Launcelot.

Launcelot: Well, if he's regular, he must have a good diet, which means that he must be a gentleman. So, *ipso facto*, he must be Master Launcelot. At any rate, he's the only Launcelot I know.

Gobbo: Whatever.

Launcelot: Poor fellow. He's dead. Didn't you know?

Gobbo: What!

Launcelot: Yes, yes. A tragic accident. Shot himself with his own arrow. A hell of a sportsman, he was.

Gobbo: Oh, my God! This is terrible! Who's going to support me in my old age?

Launcelot: Oh! Is that what I'm supposed to do?

Gobbo: What do you mean?

Launcelot: Don't you recognize me, father? Your own son, Launcelot!

(Gobbo feels Launcelot's head and face.)

Gobbo: Oh! Oh! You're alive! Alive!

Launcelot: I won't be alive much longer the way the Jew keeps starving me. Feel my ribs.

(Gobbo feels Launcelot's ribs.)

Gobbo: Oh, dear! I was wondering how you were getting on with him. I was going to bring him a present.

Launcelot: A present? For that bastard? Forget it. I've decided to leave him. Save your present for Master Bassanio. He's the man I want to work for. He's very kind to his servants. — Oh, look. Here he comes now.

(Bassanio comes in with his servant Leonardo and an attendant.)

Bassanio (To Attendant): Okay, you go ahead, but make sure dinner's ready by five o'clock. Deliver these letters, get the uniforms made, and ask Gratiano to come and see me.

(The attendant leaves.)

Launcelot: Father, ask him for me — about the job.

Gobbo (To Bassanio): Hello, sir! Bless you, sir!

Bassanio: Hello. What can I do for you?

Gobbo: This is my boy Launcelot. He's a poor boy — but a good boy, I assure you — and he would like — that is, he's a servant by profession, you know, and—

Launcelot: I work for the Jew Shylock. Or, rather, I did. I'm not working for him any more because he's been mean to me.

Gobbo: I have a present for you, sir. And if you'd be kind enough to do an old man a big favour and, um—

Launcelot: And give me a job. My name is Launcelot.

Bassanio: Ah, yes. I know who you are. I know your boss. He's actually spoken well of you. Okay. You can work for me — that is, if you'd rather work for a poor gentleman than a rich Jew.

Launcelot: It would be a step up.

Bassanio: Fine. You and your father can go say goodbye to Shylock and then come to my house. (*To Leonardo*) Leonardo, make sure he gets best uniform available.

Launcelot (To Gobbo): You see how lucky I am? It's all in my palm. There's my life line. And there's my fate line. And there's the, uh — the other line. And see how all these little lines branch off? This is where I cheat death. And these are all my wives and mistresses. And right here is where I get caught in bed with a duchess and escape by jumping out a second-storey window and land on a thick hedge and get away unscratched.

Gobbo: Good for you, boy!

Launcelot: Now let's go to Shylock and tell him I'm quitting.

(Launcelot and Gobbo leave.)

Bassanio: Leonardo, take care of this (*Hands him a paper*). These items have to be picked up. Then hurry back, because I'm having dinner with somebody important.

Leonardo: I'll take care of it.

(Leonardo starts to leave and meets Gratiano coming in.)

Gratiano: Where's your boss?

Leonardo: Right here, sir.

(Leonardo leaves.)

Gratiano: Bassanio!

Bassanio: Gratiano!

Gratiano: I have a favour to ask.

Bassanio: Whatever it is, the answer is yes.

Gratiano: I want to go to Belmont with you. I want to see this rich lady you intend to marry.

Bassanio: Well....Okay, you can come with me, but on one condition. You have to behave yourself. (*Gratiano gives an expression of mild protest.*) Sometimes you get a little too wild and loud and vulgar. I don't mind. I'm your friend, so I'm used to it. But the people in Belmont don't know you, and if you start acting up and offend them, that's not going to do me any good. I have to make as good an impression as possible.

Gratiano: Bro, I will be the soul of discretion. I'll be on my best behavior. I'll go read the thickest fucking etiquette book I can find. I'll be a goddamn choir boy.

Bassanio: Yeah. That's exactly what I meant.

Gratiano: When we go to Belmont — not here.

Bassanio: No, you can be your normal self here. In fact, you can come to dinner. I'm having company, and it should be fun for you, too. But right now I have some business to take care of.

Gratiano: Okay. Great. I'm going to meet up with Lorenzo and the boys, and we'll pass by your place around dinner.

Bassanio: Okay. See you later.

(*They leave in different directions.*)

Act 2, Scene 3. Jessica and Launcelot come in.

Jessica: I'm so sorry you're leaving my father, Launcelot. I'm going to miss you. Look, here's a ducat. I want you to give this letter to Lorenzo. He'll be at Bassanio's for dinner this evening. It's very personal, so give it to him discreetly. You'd better go now. I don't want my father to see me talking to you.

Launcelot: I'm going to miss you, too, Jessica. You're the nicest Jewish girl I ever met. Goodbye.

Jessica: Goodbye. (*Launcelot leaves. Then Jessica speaks directly to the audience.*) I want to get away from my father so bad. If Lorenzo keeps his promise, I'm going to marry him and become a Christian.

(*She leaves.*)

Act 2, Scene 4. Gratiano, Lorenzo, Salarino, and Solanio come in.

Lorenzo: Okay, this is what we'll do. We'll sneak away at dinner time and go to my house and put on our disguises and then go back.

Solanio: I want to be some kind of monster.

Salarino: I want to be a Martian.

Lorenzo: It's four o'clock. We have two hours to get ready.

(Launcelot comes in with Jessica's letter.)

Launcelot: I have a letter for you, sir.

(He gives Lorenzo the letter. Lorenzo reads it and smiles.)

Gratiano: It's a love letter, that's what it is.

Launcelot (To Lorenzo): Can I go, sir?

Lorenzo: Where are you going?

Launcelot: I'm to invite my old boss, Shylock, to come to dinner with my new boss, Bassanio.

Lorenzo (Giving Launcelot a coin): Here. Take this. *(Speaks to him in a low voice)* Tell Jessica everything is go. And don't let her father know anything. *(Launcelot leaves.)* — You guys can go and get ready for the masquerade party. I have someone who'll be my torchbearer.

Salarino: Okay, we'll see you later.

(Salarino and Solanio leave.)

Gratiano: That letter's from Jessica, right?

Lorenzo: Right. I'm going to sneak her out of her father's house. She's going to be disguised as a page, and she'll be my torchbearer. She's taking her own gold and jewels. Come on. You can read the letter on the way.

(He hands Gratiano the letter as they leave.)

Act 2, Scene 5. Shylock and Launcelot come in.

Shylock: You'll find out that working for Bassanio won't be like working for me. You won't be able to stuff yourself with food, and loaf and sleep like you did here. — Jessica! Where are you?

(Jessica comes in.)

Jessica: Yes, father?

Shylock: I have an invitation for dinner. Here are my keys. You watch the house. *(To Launcelot)* I don't really feel like going, but it's a free meal, after all.

Launcelot: Oh, yes. You should go, sir. I've been following omens, and I predict there'll be a masquerade party at the house. You see, last Easter I got a nosebleed at six in the morning, and that was four years after the nosebleed I got on Ash Wednesday — although that one was in the evening.

Shylock: A masquerade party? Like some kind of pagan Mardi Gras? Bloody hell! — Jessica, you stay indoors and don't even look out the window. I don't want you to be corrupted by drunken rowdies on the street and loose women flashing their tits. — Launcelot, go tell them I'm coming.

Launcelot: Yes. I'll go right along and let them know. (*Aside to Jessica*) Your guy will be coming, so watch from the window.

(*Launcelot leaves.*)

Shylock: What did he say?

Jessica: He said close the window in case it rains.

Shylock: Yes. That's good advice. He's a nice boy. But rather lazy. Let him live off the Christian for a change. You stay inside till I get back. I may come home early.

(*He leaves.*)

Jessica (To the audience): With any luck, I won't be here when he gets back.

(*She leaves.*)

Act 2, Scene 6. *Gratiano and Salarino come in, dressed for a masquerade. (Stage director's choice. Anything goes.) They are outside of Shylock's house in the evening.*

Gratiano: This is where we're supposed to meet Lorenzo.

Salarino: He's late.

Gratiano: How do I look?

Salarino: I'd say you look perfect — for this audience, at least. — Oh, here he comes.

(*Lorenzo comes in, also wearing a costume.*)

Lorenzo: Sorry I'm late. Business. You understand.

Gratiano: Yeah, yeah.

Lorenzo: You know who lives here? The Jew.

Salarino: Shylock? No shit!

Lorenzo: My future father-in-law. Only, he doesn't know it yet. (*A noise overhead. Jessica appears at a window, disguised in a page's uniform.*) Who's there?

Jessica: I hear a familiar voice down there. I wonder if it could be—

Lorenzo: It's me — Lorenzo.

Jessica: Oh, darn! I was expecting my boyfriend.

Lorenzo: Oh, him! I just saw him get into a carriage with some gypsy. They were all over each other. Might as well forget about him. I'll be your boyfriend instead.

Jessica: Good. You're so much handsomer. Here, catch this box. (*She pushes out a box about the size of a suitcase. The three men catch it together.*) I never dressed up like a boy before. I feel silly.

Lorenzo: You'll be fine. You'll be my torchbearer to the masquerade party at Bassanio's. Come on. We'll be late.

Jessica: Just let me lock up and grab some more money. (*She leaves the window and then comes out of the house.*)

Gratiano: Hey, sister, you rock!

Lorenzo: Isn't she awesome? She's the love of my life. Come on. Let's go.

Gratiano: You guys go on. I have to adjust my costume. I'll catch up with you.

Lorenzo: Okay.

(Lorenzo, Jessica, and Salarino leave. Then Antonio comes in.)

Antonio: Gratiano? Is that you?

Gratiano (To the audience): You see? Even in this outfit and at night, he knows me.

Antonio: Where is everyone? It's almost nine o'clock.

Gratiano: You just missed them — Lorenzo, Jessica, and Salarino.

Antonio: Listen, the masquerade party is cancelled. Bassanio is boarding the ship for Belmont immediately because the winds are perfect. He doesn't want to leave without you.

Gratiano: Right-o! I'm going to Belmont!

(He leaves quickly, and Antonio follows.)

Act 2, Scene 7. *In Belmont. A trumpet flourish. Portia and Nerissa come in with the Prince of Morocco and his attendants.*

Portia: Nerissa, show the Prince the three chests.

(Nerissa draws the curtain open, revealing the three chests — gold, silver, and lead.)

Portia: Here they are, Prince. You get to choose one. And remember — if you pick a wrong one, you can't propose to any other woman for the rest of your life. And you have to leave immediately. No protests allowed.

Morocco: Yes, yes. Well, well. Heh, heh, heh. Let's have a closer look. — I see they have inscriptions. The gold one says, '*He who chooses me will get what many men want.*' — Well, I should hope so. — The silver one says, '*He who chooses me will get what he deserves.*' — Heh, heh. A clever man, your father. — Let's see what the lead one says. — '*He who chooses me must give and risk all he has.*' — Uh, oh! — And how will I know if I've chosen the right one?

Portia: There will be a picture of me inside.

Morocco: Mmm. (*He walks back and forth, pausing occasionally.*) Let's see now. — '*He who chooses me must give and risk all he has.*' — Risk all I have for lead? If I'm going to risk all I have,

it's going to be for the biggest reward possible. Lead's no reward at all, so that one's stupid. I can rule that out. Now, the silver box. — *'He who chooses me will get what he deserves.'* — Well, I certainly deserve a lot, on account of my position and talents. I certainly deserve you. So that's a maybe. — And the gold box says, *'He who chooses me will get what many men want.'* — Well, a lot of men want you. I'm sure your father anticipated that. And any father would set his own daughter above other people's daughters. And gold is more valuable than silver. Even a fool would choose gold before silver. It's perfectly obvious and logical. It has to be gold. And that's my final answer.

(Portia hands him the key, and he opens the gold chest.)

Morocco: What the fuck? *(He reaches in and pulls out a skull with a note in the eye socket. He unfolds the note and reads it.)*

'Many a fool has sold his soul

To get his hands on piles of gold.

So now we know what's on your mind.

Go shove a pickle in your behind.'

FUCK...ME! — Goodbye, Portia. I'm outa here.

(Morocco leaves with his attendants.)

Portia: Whew! That's a relief! I don't have to marry a darkie. — Okay, Nerissa, lock it up.

(Nerissa replaces the items in the chest and locks it as Portia walks out.)

Act 2, Scene 8. *Salarino and Solanio enter and face the audience, standing very straight. They speak directly to the audience in a rather loud voice. (Optionally for the director, they may be in their masquerade costumes.)*

Salarino: Bassanio and Gratiano have sailed away to Belmont.

Solanio: The Jew freaked out when he came home to find his daughter missing, along with a large quantity of money and jewels. He got even more freaked out when he found out she had eloped with Lorenzo. He was shouting up and down the streets, "My daughter stole my money! My daughter ran off with a Christian!"

Salarino: He complained to the Duke of Venice. The Duke sent out a search party. Antonio informed the Duke that Lorenzo and Jessica didn't get on the boat to Belmont. Instead, they were on a gondola somewhere.

Solanio: This is Venice, you know. We have authentic gondolas — the best. Not like those phony jackoff gondolas you find in theme parks.

(Salarino and Solanio relax and face each other and speak normally.)

Solanio: The Jew is so pissed, he's going to take it out on somebody, you know. And Antonio is Lorenzo's friend. So I'd say Antonio had better pay back that loan on time.

Salarino: That's for sure. And you know what? I heard that a merchant ship from Venice got wrecked in the English Channel. The first thing I thought of was that it might be one of Antonio's ships.

Solanio: You'd better tell him. But try to tell him gently so he doesn't panic.

Salarino: Antonio is the nicest dude in the world. He cares more about Bassanio than about himself. He told Bassanio, "Don't worry about me and the loan. Take all the time you need in Belmont to win that girl."

Solanio: Yeah, he's a good guy. You're right. — Remember how depressed he was the other day? He deserves some cheering up. Don't you think?

Salarino: Yeah. I agree. Let's go find him.

(They leave.)

Act 2, Scene 9. *In Belmont. Nerissa is standing beside the three chests. A trumpet flourish. Then Portia comes in, leading the Prince of Arragon and his attendants.*

Nerissa (Aside to the audience): It's the Prince of Arragon.

Portia: Here are the three chests, Prince. If you pick the right one, you get to marry me. If you pick the wrong one, you're on your way home. I've explained the conditions.

Arragon: Yes. I understand. — Well, let's see. Gold, silver, or lead. (*Reads the inscription on the lead chest*) 'He who chooses me must give and risk all he has.' — No, thanks. You're worth a risk, but not a total risk. So I'll rule out the lead box. The gold box says, 'He who chooses me will get what many men want.' Well, that's so obvious, isn't it? Everyone wants gold. It's flashy. And this inscription is a lure to the stupid men of the world. So, counter-intuitively, the gold box has to be wrong because it looks so obviously right. But the silver box says, 'He who chooses me will get what he deserves.' — And I think people should get exactly what they deserve — no more and no less. That way the superior people rise to the top and have the power they deserve, while the idiots and mediocrities are put in their proper places — which is to say, out of my way. That's the kind of society we ought to live in. People who score below a certain I.Q. get sent to a slave labour camp. Why pretend that everyone's equal? Some people are better than others. That's just the way it is. — So I'm picking the silver box.

Portia: Okay. Here's the key.

(*Arragon unlocks the chest*.)

Arragon: What the fuck? (*He takes from the chest a bobble-head or figurine of some idiotic figure, such as Alfred E. Newman. There is a little scroll stuck onto it, which Arragon unfolds and reads.*)

'The wise man finds what he deserves,

*And likewise does the fool
 That thinks himself superior
 Because he went to school.
 Who seeks the truth must learn the world
 And not some dusty tome,
 So gather up your sorry ass
 And fuck off and go home.'*
 (Arragon stands there stunned and speechless.)

Portia (Grinning): I'm sorry.

(Arragon drops the figure and the scroll and storms out, followed by his attendants.)

Portia: Like moths to the flame, Nerissa. They always get burned.

Nerissa: Ain't it the truth, madam.

Portia: Close it up.

(Nerissa replaces the items and closes the chest, As she is drawing the curtain closed, a Messenger arrives.)

Messenger: A message for Madam Portia, if you please.

Portia: I'm Portia.

Messenger: Madam, a young man from Venice wishes to inform you that his master will be arriving to see you shortly. This lord sends his greetings, and he has also sent you some very beautiful presents. I'm sure he's the finest candidate who has come here so far.

Portia: Are you pimping for your cousin or something? — Never mind. — Come on, Nerissa. Let's check this guy out.

Nerissa (Giddily, to the audience): I hope it's Bassanio!

(They leave.)

Act 3, Scene 1. Salarino and Solanio come in.

Salarino: You know that ship that got wrecked in the English Channel? The rumor is that it was one of Antonio's. And it was loaded with valuable cargo.

Solanio: Yeah, that's what I heard, too.

Salarino: Let's hope he doesn't lose anything else.

Solanio: Here comes the devil.

(Shylock comes in.)

Shylock: You guys! You knew my daughter intended to run away, didn't you?

Salarino: Maybe. So what?

Solanio: You shouldn't be so surprised. Sooner or later most kids leave their parents.

Shylock: She'll be damned for it.

Salarino: Damned by you, not by God.

Shylock: She's my own flesh and blood, and she's turned against me.

Salarino: Hard to see any similarity, really. I can't imagine a daughter more different than her father. Anyway, did you hear about Antonio losing a ship?

Shylock: That big-shot merchant. He's not so big now, is he? I never should've loaned him that money. But one way or another, I intend to collect what's due me. He'd better think about that.

Salarino: What — you're gonna take a pound of his flesh? What the hell good is that?

Shylock: It's good for revenge, that's what. That guy's cost me a lot of money over the years — undercutting my business, bad-mouthing me, encouraging my enemies. And why? Because I'm a Jew! If a Jew offends a Christian, what happens? The Christian gets revenge, and everyone says "Amen!" But if a Christian offends a Jew, the Jew is supposed to stand there and take it, right? Like, a Jew isn't a real person with blood in his veins. He doesn't feel pain or have any feelings. Oh, no. Well, let me tell you, all you Christians are going to get an object lesson in revenge from this Jew.

(A Servant of Antonio comes in.)

Servant: Solanio and Salarino, hello! My master Antonio is home right now and would like to speak to you.

Salarino: Right. We're on our way.

(Solanio and Salarino start to leave and meet Tubal coming in.)

Solanio: It's the other Jew — Tubal. The devil's brother.

(Solanio, Salarino, and the Servant leave.)

Shylock: Tubal! My friend! Have you been able to find out where my daughter is?

Tubal: I've been all over town and in Genoa, too, trying to glean some intelligence for you, but no luck.

Shylock: Bloody fucking hell. I'd like to see my daughter dead in her coffin with all those jewels she stole from me. One diamond alone is worth two thousand ducats. I have the worst luck, really. It's one loss after another.

Tubal: Oh, you're not the only one with bad luck. Over in Genoa I heard one of Antonio's ships got wrecked coming from Tripoli.

Shylock: Oh, fantastic! That's what the bastard deserves!

Tubal: And I heard that your daughter blew eighty ducats in Genoa in one night.

Shylock: Oh, that little bitch! She'll blow everything before I can ever get it back.

Tubal: And you'll also be interested to know that I came back to Venice with some of Antonio's creditors. And they were of the opinion that Antonio will be forced to declare bankruptcy.

Shylock: Good! Fuck him!

Tubal: Oh, and one last bit of news. Your daughter traded a ring for a monkey.

Shylock: What!

Tubal: One of Antonio's creditors sold her the monkey in exchange for a turquoise ring.

Shylock: This is what happens when Jewish girls run off with Christian boys!

Tubal: Yes, without a doubt. Anyway, Antonio's going to be out of business.

Shylock: Tubal, do me a favour. See if you can find an officer to arrest Antonio. Arrange it two weeks ahead of time so I can pounce on him the moment the loan is due. If he's in default by so much as one minute, I'm going to cut his goddamned heart out — even if some hero shows up and offers to pay his debt for him. You'll do this for me, okay? And meet me at the synagogue later.

Tubal: Sure thing.

(They leave.)

Act 3, Scene 2. *Portia, Nerissa, Bassanio, and Gratiano* come in, with attendants, plus a Singer with a guitar. *Portia's* manner toward *Bassanio* makes it obvious she loves him.

Portia: You don't have to make your choice right now, *Bassanio*. You can stay a while and think about it. I wouldn't want to lose your company too soon. After all, if you make a wrong choice, you have to leave immediately.

Bassanio: I don't suppose you could give me a hint.

Portia: I can't. Of course, if you could read my mind, there's no rule against that.

Bassanio: Unfortunately, I can't read people's minds.

Portia (Sighing): If you could, you'd know how I feel right now.

Bassanio: I guess the only thing to do is try my luck and hope for the best.

Portia: Take your time. We'll give you some music for inspiration. Maybe that'll help.

(She signals the Singer to play. He comes forward and faces the audience. He plays some old pop song such as a song by the Monkees, or a Beach Boys surfing song. The director has a free choice here. The Singer plays at the wrong tempo, sings and plays off-key, gets the lyrics wrong, and

generally butchers the song. He is totally deadpan, like everyone else onstage. A pause will allow the audience to finished their reaction.)

Bassanio (Deadpan): Thanks. That may have helped. — Well, let's see. The gold box would seem to be the most obvious, so somebody must have picked it by now. But since you're still single, that can't be the right box. Of course, somebody else must have figured that out already and picked the next most obvious box, the silver one. But that can't be right either, because here you are still waiting for a husband. So where does that leave us? It's got to be the lead box. Nobody would expect that. Lead isn't valuable or beautiful. And the inscription seems to be designed to discourage people — *'He who chooses me must give and risk all he has.'* My friend Antonio risked his life to bankroll my trip here to Belmont. So should I be a coward now? No. I'll risk it all. You're worth it. I'll go for the lead box.

(Portia faces the audience for a moment, looking ecstatic.)

Portia: Here's the key.

(Bassanio unlocks the lead chest and reaches in and retrieves a portrait of Portia. He holds it up to the audience and then kisses it. He then reaches in and retrieves a scroll, which he unfolds and reads.)

Bassanio (Reading):

*'Heaven smiles on the virtuous soul
Who passes up the lure of gold
And silver's promise of riches galore
And chooses instead earth's humblest ore.
Good fortune has blessed you and given you bliss,
So go to your new wife and give her a kiss.'*

(Bassanio and Portia kiss. Everyone else cheers and claps.)

Portia: My lord Bassanio, I am now yours, and everything I own is yours, too. Take this ring and don't ever lose it. As long as you have it, our love will last.

(She gives him a ring.)

Bassanio: I'll wear it till the day I die.

Gratiano: Bassanio, when you get married, I'd like to be married at the same time.

Bassanio: That's fine with me. But you'll need to find a wife.

Gratiano: I've already found one. *(He goes to Nerissa and puts his arm around her.)* From the moment I first saw her, I knew I wanted to marry her.

Portia: Is this true, Nerissa?

Nerissa: Yes, madam. I want to marry Gratiano.

Portia: Then it'll be a double marriage!

(More cheering and clapping. Then Lorenzo and Jessica come in, along with Salerio, a messenger from Venice.)

Bassanio (*To Portia*): Portia, this is my friend Lorenzo and his fiancee, Jessica. And this is my friend Salerio.

Portia: Welcome, all of you.

Others: Thank you.

Bassanio (*To Lorenzo*): I didn't expect to see you here.

Lorenzo: We weren't planning to come, but we ran into Salerio, and he insisted we come with him.

Salerio (*To Bassanio*): I've got a letter for you from Antonio (*Hands him the letter*).

Bassanio: How is Antonio?

Salerio: Not so good. Just read the letter.

(Bassanio reads the letter silently, with an expression of increasing alarm.)

Portia: Is it really bad?

Bassanio: It couldn't be worse. You see, Antonio borrowed a lot of money so I could come here, and now he's in deep shit. All his ships were apparently lost at sea, and now he can't pay back the loan — to Jessica's father, Shylock. And there's a clause in the loan contract that if he doesn't repay the loan when it's due — Shylock gets to cut a pound of flesh out of his body.

Portia: What!

Bassanio: I was against it, but Antonio signed the contract because he wanted to help me. He never imagined he wouldn't be able to repay the loan.

Salerio: And now Shylock wants his pound of flesh. He's rather have that than the money. I've never known a crueler man. He's been in the Duke's face and all the high-ranking nobles' faces demanding that Antonio be prosecuted. They all told him to forget about the goddamn pound of flesh, but he's insisting that the contract be enforced. He calls it "justice."

Jessica: I heard my father say that he'd rather have Antonio's flesh than twenty times the money. Unless Antonio can find a good lawyer, I hate to think—

Portia: How much money are we talking about?

Bassanio: Three thousand ducats.

Portia: Is that all? Oh, my goodness. I'll pay the debt for him. Tell Shylock you'll pay him six thousand to tear up the contract and forget the whole thing. Only a lunatic would say no to that.

Bassanio: Will you come to Venice?

Portia: Not now. We'll get married right away, and then you go back to Venice. I'll give you all the gold you could possibly need. When everything is settled, come back with Antonio. We'll have our — honeymoon — then.

Bassanio (*Sighs*): Thanks, my love!

Act 3, Scene 1. *A jail in Venice. Shylock, Antonio, Solanio and the Jailer come in. The Jailer doesn't speak in this scene. He merely grunts. The action is taking place in an open area, not in a cell.*

Shylock: Jailer, you keep your eye on this one (*Indicating Antonio*).

Antonio: Shylock—

Shylock: You signed for the loan, and you guaranteed it with a pound of your flesh, remember? You once called me a dog, too — Remember that? Aha! Well, we have laws to enforce contracts, and I've got the law on my side, and I'm going to see to it that that contract is enforced.

Antonio: But, Shylock, please—

Shylock (*Mockingly*): Oh, Shylock, please! — You're not getting any sympathy from me. You've meddled with my business and cost me a lot of money. And now you owe me a pound of flesh, and I intend to have it.

(*Shylock leaves.*)

Solanio: What an asshole.

Antonio: He wants me dead. That's it. Plain and simple. He doesn't give a shit about the money any more. You know, I've given money to plenty of people who owed money to him, just to keep them out of his clutches, and that made me look like a hero and him like a zero. And he hates me for that.

Solanio: Surely the Duke isn't going to allow this contract to stand. I mean, a pound of flesh? Come on. This is Venice, not Fantasy Island.

Antonio: Well, that's just the point. This is Venice. This is an international trading centre. The whole world likes to do business here because we have honest laws. A contract in Venice is rock solid. You think the Duke is going to wreck the whole economic system just to save me? He'd like to save me, but he can't just nullify the contract arbitrarily. — Aw, shit. I've already lost more than a pound of flesh just worrying about it. (*Looks at his body all over*) Where can I spare a pound? — Fucking hell. — Jailer, might as well lock me up. — I hope Bassanio comes back in time to see me pay off his debt.

(*They leave.*)

Act 3, Scene 4. *Portia and Nerissa come in with Balthazar, a servant of Portia.*

Portia: Balthazar, I've made some arrangements with Lorenzo and Jessica. They're going to stay here in the house and manage the household temporarily. Launcelot will be here to help out as well. Nerissa and I are going to the monastery until our husbands return from Venice. We'll be praying constantly for them so they can save their friend Antonio.

Balthazar: Yes, madam.

(Portia hands him a letter.)

Portia: Now, this is very important, Balthazar. You must take this letter to my cousin Bellario in Padua. Ask for Doctor Bellario, the lawyer. He will give you some documents and a package of clothing. You must bring them to me immediately at the ferry dock — you know, the ferry that goes to Venice. I'll be waiting for you there. Every minute counts, so go!

Balthazar: Yes, madam!

(He leaves.)

Nerissa: Are we really going to the monastery?

Portia: No. We're going on a secret mission. We're going to Venice — disguised as men.

Nerissa: What for?

Portia: I'll explain it to you on the way.

Nerissa: Nobody's ever mistaken me for a man — or you either.

Portia: Well, we're going to fake it. And it's got to be convincing, because a man's life depends on it. Come on.

(They leave.)

Act 3, Scene 5. *This scene is deleted.*

Act 4, Scene 1. *A courtroom in Venice. The Duke, the Magnificoes (high-ranking nobles), Antonio, Bassanio, Gratiano, Salerio, and attendants come in.*

Duke (Bangs his gavel): This court is now in session. Is Antonio here?

Antonio: I'm here, sir.

Duke: You're in a bit of a mess, I should say. The man who is bringing a complaint against you is a cruel, heartless, low-down piece of—

First Magnifico: Ahem! *(Tugs the Duke's sleeve discreetly)*

Duke: Uh, yes — Well, let's just say the guy rhymes with spit. *(The Magnificoes all nod in agreement.)* Now, Antonio, I've tried to reason with the man, but he insists on asserting his legal rights, and this court has to uphold the law.

Antonio: I understand. I'll take whatever's coming to me.

Duke: All right. — Somebody call in that Jew bas—

First Magnifico: Ahem! *(Tugs the Duke's sleeve again.)*

Duke: Uh, yes — I mean, please call in the, uh, the Jew — no, the, uh, businessman of the Jewish faith.

Salerio (Calling loudly out the door): The Jew!

(Shylock comes in and stands before the Duke.)

Duke: Shylock, a lot of us think that this is all just a show on your part, and you don't really mean it. You're not really going to insist on taking a pound of flesh from this man. He's suffered terrible financial losses with his ships. Surely you're willing to cut him some slack under the circumstances, aren't you? Everyone here is hoping you will.

Shylock: The only thing I'm willing to cut is a pound of his flesh. I have a written contract. If you don't uphold it, then no contract in Venice will be considered secure, and a lot of traders from other countries won't come here.

Duke: But what possible good can a pound of human flesh be to you? Why on earth would you want it?

Shylock: I don't have to explain why I want it. I don't need to have a reason — other than the fact that I hate Antonio.

Gratiano: What an asshole.

Duke (Banging the gavel): Watch your language.

Shylock (To Gratiano): That's what you are, but what am I?

Antonio (To Gratiano): Don't waste your breath. It's like talking to a rock.

Bassanio (To Shylock): Look, Shylock, I've got six thousand ducats for you right now. That's twice what Antonio owes you.

Shylock: It doesn't matter. He's in default. I no longer want the money. I want the pound of flesh.

Duke: You know, if you are merciless to others now, then someday you'll get no mercy from others when it's your ass in the meat-grinder.

First Magnifico: Ahem!

Duke: Yeah, yeah. Everybody knows what I mean.

Shylock: That will never happen to me. I haven't done anything wrong, and I don't intend to. You want me to forget about something I'm legally entitled to. Suppose I told you to free your slaves — and some of you have slaves, that's the truth — or pay them a minimum wage, or give them paid vacations? What would you say to me? You'd say, "Mind your own business, and don't tell us how to manage ours." — So, are you going to enforce the law, or not?

Duke: I've sent for Doctor Bellario to give a legal opinion to help the court. If he doesn't show up, I can adjourn the court and put the matter off indefinitely.

(Salerio goes out for a second and comes back in.)

Salerio: My lord, there's a messenger here from Padua with a letter from Bellario.

Duke: Good. Bring him in.

(Salerio goes out.)

Bassanio (To Antonio): Don't worry, bro. I'll give the bastard a pound of my flesh before he takes it from you. I won't let you die for my sake.

Antonio: No. You have to live. You just got married..

(Salerio returns with Nerissa, disguised as a lawyer's clerk.)

Duke: You're here from Doctor Bellario?

Nerissa: Yes, my lord. He sends his greetings. And this letter is for you.

(She hands him the letter. Meanwhile, Shylock is sharpening his knife on the sole of his shoe.)

Gratiano (Aside to Bassanio): The asshole is sharpening his knife. He can't wait.

Duke (Looking at the letter): Bellario has sent a young legal expert to speak to the court. Is he here?

Nerissa: He's right outside.

Duke: Okay, bring him in. *(Nerissa leaves. To the Magnificoes)* Bellario was too sick to come in person. This fellow is named Balthazar. He's from Rome.

(Nerissa returns with Portia, disguised as the lawyer Balthazar.)

Portia: Greetings to the court.

Duke: You're most welcome, sir. Doctor Bellario speaks very highly of you. He says we should be guided by your opinion. Are you familiar with this case?

Portia: Yes. Can you introduce me to the two parties?

Duke: Antonio and Shylock, step forward.

(Antonio and Shylock step forward.)

Portia: You're Shylock?

Shylock: Yes.

Portia: And you, Antonio. You signed the contract?

Antonio: Yes.

Portia: Then the Jew has to show you mercy.

Shylock: Why?

Portia: Mercy is a spiritual quality given to us by God. It should flow from us as naturally as rain falls for the sky. It is as much a blessing to the giver as the receiver. And just as we pray to God for mercy for ourselves, we must show it to others. This is how we save our souls — not by laws. You should drop this suit against the merchant, otherwise the court will have to carry out the terms of the contract against him.

Shylock: That's exactly what I want — to have the contract enforced. I want justice.

Portia: And he's unable to pay back the loan?

Bassanio: Counselor, my friend Antonio had some bad luck and doesn't have the money, but I offered to pay his debt for him — double the amount. Even more than that, if necessary. If the Jew won't take it, then he's just being malicious. (*To the Duke*) Your Grace, can't you bend the law just this once? You can't let this miserable Jew get away with this.

Duke: Counselor?

Portia: From a strictly legal point of view, there's no way the contract can be overturned. If that were to happen, there would be a whole rat's nest of legal complications. People would be lining up in court to have their contracts overturned so they could avoid their obligations.

Shylock: Exactly right! Listen to this lawyer, my lord. He understands the law.

Portia: Can I have a look at the contract?

Shylock (*Hands Portia a document*): Here it is.

Portia (*Perusing*): Hmm. — Well, it's clear that the Jew is within his rights. (*To Shylock*) But you've been offered a lot more money to forget about it. Couldn't you just accept it? The parties to a contract can agree to cancel it. That would make everyone here very happy.

Shylock: Everyone except me. No. I'm sticking to the contract. You've already said it's a binding contract. You're a legal expert, and you were sent here to advise the court. So, do you advise the court to uphold the contract or not?

Portia: Yes. According to the law, it must be upheld.

Antonio: Let's get this over with.

Portia: I'm sorry, sir. You'd better take your shirt off and get ready for the knife.

Shylock (*Jumping for joy*): Yes! — And I get to cut out a pound of flesh closest to his heart. That's what it says.

Portia: Do you have a scale to weigh the flesh?

Shylock: Oh, yes. Right here.

Portia: Of course, you should have a surgeon on hand to stitch him up so he doesn't bleed to death.

Shylock: That would cost me money. I don't want to.

Bassanio: I'll pay for it, for chrissake!

Portia (*To Shylock*): You're not even willing to do that much for him?

Shylock: No. We're sticking to the wording of the contract. There's nothing in it that requires me to do that.

Portia (*To Antonio*): Do you have anything to say?

Antonio: No. (*To Bassanio*) Goodbye. (*They embrace*.) Don't be sad about this. I've had a luckier life than most people. At least I don't have to face getting old and being feeble and sick and all that. Give your wife my best regards and tell her that I died still your best friend.

Bassanio: I'd give everything up to save you if I could. My own life. Even my wife's life.

Portia: She wouldn't want to hear that.

Gratiano: I'd let my wife go to heaven right now if she could find some angels to make this rotten Jew change his mind.

Nerissa: Sacrifice your own wife, would you? Oh, well!

Shylock: We're wasting time. Let's get on with it.

Portia: You can have your pound of flesh. The law is on your side.

Shylock: Thank you. You're a fine lawyer, and a righteous one, too. You could even be a Jew.

Portia: Thank you. There is one little technicality, however. The contract specifies a pound of flesh, but it doesn't say anything about blood. If you draw a single drop of blood, the state can confiscate all your property under the law.

Gratiano: Brilliant! I never used to like lawyers, but now I do. — Take that, Jew!

Shylock (*To Portia*): Is that true?

Portia: Of course. You wanted justice, didn't you? Well, you're going to get justice.

Gratiano (*To the audience*): I'm loving this! Aren't you?

Shylock (*Nervously*): I've changed my mind. I'll take the money. — Bassanio, you can pay me, um, three times the amount of the loan, and I'll forget about the pound of flesh.

Bassanio: No problem. I've got the money right here.

Portia: No, no. Wait a minute. The Jew wants justice. He's got to take the pound of flesh, not the money. — Go ahead, Shylock. Take the pound of flesh — not one gram more and not one gram less — and not one drop of blood. Otherwise, you'll be condemned to death and all your property will be confiscated.

Shylock: No! No! That's impossible! Just let me have the money, and I'll go home!

Portia: But you've already refused it publicly, right in this court. It's on the record. So you don't get the money.

Shylock: Then to hell with it! Let him keep the money. I'm leaving.

(He starts to leave, but the attendants block him.)

Portia: Oh, no, you're not. There's another legal issue here. The law says that if any foreign resident — and that's you. You're a foreign resident. — If any foreign resident attempts to kill a Venetian citizen, directly or indirectly, he forfeits all his property — half to the intended victim, and the other half to the state. In addition, the offender may be sentenced to death. The Duke has the power to decide that. The facts in evidence clearly establish that you tried indirectly to kill Antonio.

Gratiano: Hang the bastard! I'll pay for the rope!

(Shylock falls to his knees, facing the Duke.)

Shylock: No! No! Don't kill me! I didn't mean it! I'm sorry! I'm sorry! Please! Have mercy! Have mercy! *(Throws himself at Antonio's feet)* Antonio! I'm sorry! Tell them not to kill me! Please! I beg you! Have mercy, Antonio! Please! I'll do anything for you! I'll do anything! *(Sobbing)*

Duke: I'll spare your life, Shylock — just to prove that I'm as good a Christian as I am a judge. Antonio gets half of everything you own, and the state of Venice gets the other half. — However, I may reduce this penalty. *(To Portia)* Counselor, what's your opinion?

Portia: The state's half can be reduced, but not Antonio's. He gets half, no matter what.

Shylock: Don't take everything away from me. I'll have no way to make a living. I'll end up on the street. I'll starve to death.

Portia: Of course, if Antonio were to show you some mercy—

Gratiano: Hang the bastard!

Antonio: If the court agrees to forget about the state's half, that's fine with me. As for my half, I'll put it into a trust for Lorenzo and Jessica. And there are two other conditions I'm asking for. First, Shylock must become a Christian. And second, he has to make out a will here and now leaving all his property to Lorenzo and Jessica.

Duke: Yes. I'll go along with that. — That's the deal, Shylock, if you want me to spare your life.

Shylock (Wearily): Yes, yes. Whatever you say. I'll agree to it. — Please, my lord. I feel rather sick. I'd like to go home. You can send me the documents, and I'll sign them.

Duke: Okay. Go home. *(Bangs the gavel)* Court is adjourned.

Gratiano (To Shylock): If I were the judge, I would've hanged you.

(Shylock leaves.)

Duke (To Portia): Well done, sir! Will you come to dinner at my home tonight?

Portia: Truly, your Grace, I cannot. I have to get back to Padua as soon as possible.

Duke: Oh, too bad. — Antonio, be sure to give this gentleman a reward. He saved your life.

(The Duke, Magnificoes, and attendants leave.)

Bassanio (To Portia): Dude, you're a hero! You take the six thousand ducats.

Antonio: It's the least we can do for you.

Portia: Oh, no, no. I don't need the money. My satisfaction is payment enough. I hope you'll recognize me the next time we meet. Good luck.

Bassanio: Wait! I have to give you something. A memento of some sort. What can I give you?

Portia: Well, if you insist — How about that ring?

Bassanio: This ring? Oh, um...I...that is...oh, I'd be ashamed to give you this little nothing of a ring.

Portia: Oh, I think it's quite lovely. I'd love to have it.

Bassanio: I'll buy you a better one — a much bigger one. How's that? This one is...well, you see...my wife gave it to me. And I promised her I'd never part with it.

Portia: Oh, I'm sure your wife would forgive you, considering the circumstances. — But never mind. It's all right. Goodbye.

(Portia and Nerissa leave.)

Antonio: Hey, bro, let him have the ring. He deserves it. Do it for me as a friend, okay?

Bassanio (To Gratiano): Here, Gratiano. *(Gives the ring to Gratiano)* Run after him and give him the ring. And then take him to Antonio's house.

Gratiano: Right!

(Gratiano leaves, running.)

Bassanio: What a day! Come on. First thing in the morning we'll go back to Belmont. I can't wait for you to meet Portia.

(Bassanio and Antonio leave.)

Act 4, Scene 2. Portia and Nerissa come in, still in disguise.

Portia: Find out where Shylock lives and take him these documents to sign. We'll leave tonight and get back to Belmont before our husbands. Lorenzo will be thrilled with the news.

(Gratiano comes in.)

Gratiano (Out of breath): Whew! I'm glad I found you. Bassanio decided to give you the ring after all. *(He gives her the ring.)* And he's inviting you to dinner.'

Portia: We can't stay for dinner, but tell him thank you for the ring. And could you take my clerk to Shylock's house?

Gratiano: Sure. I'd be glad to.

Nerissa (Aside to Portia): I'll see if I can get my husband's ring, too. I made him swear to keep it forever.

Portia (Aside to Nerissa): I'll bet you can. And later on the joke will be on them. Go on now. You know where to meet me.

(Portia leaves.)

Nerissa: Now, sir, you can escort me to Shylock's house.

(Nerissa and Gratiano leave.)

Act 5, Scene 1. *In Belmont. Lorenzo and Jessica come in. It's nighttime, and they gaze up at the sky.*

Lorenzo: There's a full moon tonight.

Jessica: It's a moon made for lovers.

Lorenzo: Romeo and Juliet.

Jessica: Tristan and Isolde.

Lorenzo: Heloise and Abelard.

Jessica: Guinevere and Sir Lancelot.

Lorenzo: Samson and Delilah.

Jessica: Solomon and Sheba.

Lorenzo: Antony and Cleopatra.

Jessica: Hero and Leander.

Lorenzo: Ulysses and Penelope.

Jessica: Paris and Helen of Troy.

Lorenzo: Dolce and Gabbana.

Jessica: Scylla and Charybdis.

Lorenzo: Benson and Hedges.

Jessica: Gumby and Pokey.

Lorenzo: Simon and Schuster.

(Stephano, a messenger, comes in.)

Stephano: Good evening. I am Stephano, a messenger of Portia.

Lorenzo: Yes?

Stephano: My mistress will be here at Belmont before dawn. She's at the monastery. Has Master Bassanio returned yet?

Lorenzo: No, not yet. We've had no word from him.

(Launcelot comes in.)

Launcelot: Oh! Oh! Oh! Where's Master Lorenzo?

Lorenzo: Right here. You don't need to shout.

Launcelot: Where? Where?

Lorenzo: Right in front of you.

Launcelot: Well, when you see him, tell him Master Bassanio will be here in the morning — with good news!

(Launcelot leaves.)

Lorenzo: Well, that's a relief! — Stephano, go tell the staff Portia is coming home. And send the musicians out to play for us.

Stephano: Right away!

(Stephano leaves.)

Lorenzo: Well, Jessica, what could be nicer? The moon, the stars, the planets. You've heard of the music of the spheres, haven't you?

Jessica: Yes. It's the sound of universal harmony.

(The musicians come in.)

Lorenzo: That's what I'm in the mood for. *(To the musicians)* Play something — celestial.

(The musicians will play something utterly awful, like a bad polka, a German beerhall tune, or some old show tune. Director's choice. It must sound hilariously bad, and it must be done deadpan.)

Jessica (Looking entranced): It's so beautiful, it would transport the living straight to heaven!

Lorenzo (The same): Or make the dead come out of their graves!

(When the music finishes, Portia and Nerissa come in.)

Lorenzo: You're back!

Portia: Have our husbands returned yet?

Lorenzo: Not yet. But a messenger told us they were on their way.

Portia: Listen, you mustn't tell them we were ever gone, okay? You, too, Jessica. Pretend we were here the whole time.

(A trumpet sounds.)

Lorenzo: That'll be them. Don't worry, we won't say a word.

(Bassanio, Antonio, and Gratiano come in. Bassanio and Portia embrace. Gratiano and Nerissa embrace and move aside and talk.)

Bassanio: My dear, this is my friend Antonio — recently saved from the jaws of death.

Portia: I'm so glad! Welcome to our house.

Antonio: Thank you.

Gratiano (To Nerissa): No, I swear it! I gave it to the law clerk. I didn't think you'd be so upset about it.

Portia: What's going on?

Gratiano: It's the ring she gave me. Just a little gold ring. I wasn't supposed to give it away, but I gave it to the law clerk. It was a gesture of gratitude. The lawyer saved Antonio's life.

Nerissa: You promised you'd wear it till the day you died! If I ever get my hands on that law clerk, I'll strangle him.

Gratiano: Aw, sweetie, he was just a boy. A nice boy. No taller than you. He asked me for it as a payment. I couldn't say no.

Portia: Oh, you shouldn't have done that, Gratiano. You know how sentimental women are about certain things. I gave Bassanio a ring, too, and he certainly would never give it away.

Bassanio (Aside to the audience): Uh, oh.

Gratiano: Oh, but he did. He gave his ring to that lawyer from Padua. The lawyer wouldn't take any money, and we couldn't just send him away without any reward.

Portia (To Bassanio): You gave away my ring?

Bassanio: Uh, no...not as such....I mean, uh, in a manner of speaking...you might say...um, yes. I did.

Portia: Well, I'm not getting into bed with you until I see that ring.

Nerissa (To Gratiano): That goes for me, too.

Bassanio: But sweetheart, if you'd been there, you'd understand.

Portia: I think you really gave that ring to a woman. Didn't you?

Bassanio: No! No! No! It was the lawyer who saved Antonio's life. I wanted to give him the money, but he liked the ring so much—

Gratiano: Right! That's just the way it happened.

Portia: Oh, well! If that lawyer deserved my ring, I'd say he deserves me, too. I might as well sleep with him.

Nerissa: Yes. And I might as well sleep with his clerk.

Gratiano: Now, honey, don't be like that.

Antonio: Oh, please, you guys. Don't fight about it. You're making me feel guilty. If I hadn't signed that stupid contract, there never would've been any trouble.

Portia: It's not your fault. Don't feel guilty.

Bassanio: Just forgive me this one time, okay? I promise I'll never break my word again.

Antonio: And I'll guarantee that with my life.

Portia (Gives Antonio the ring): Good. Then give him this. And tell him not to give it away like the other one.

(Antonio gives Bassanio the ring.)

Bassanio: Wait a minute! This is the same ring! How did you get it?

Portia: Oh, well! I must confess. I got it from the lawyer — but I had to sleep with him to get it.

(Nerissa gives her ring to Gratiano.)

Nerissa: Yes. And I had to sleep with the clerk to get this back.

Gratiano: What the— Am I losing my mind?

Bassanio: I think we're both losing our minds.

Portia (Laughs): This letter will explain it. *(She gives Bassanio a letter.)* It's from Bellario, my cousin in Padua.

(Bassanio reads the letter.)

Bassanio: You were the lawyer! And Nerissa was the clerk!

Nerissa: I think we performed very well as men, don't you think?

Gratiano: I'll give you my answer to that later.

(Portia gives a letter to Antonio.)

Portia: And this is some news for you, Antonio. And don't ask me how I got it.

(Antonio reads the letter.)

Antonio: Three of my ships are back! With all their cargo! I'm back in business!

Portia: And there's a surprise for you, too, Lorenzo.

(Nerissa gives Lorenzo a document.)

Nerissa: This is from Jessica's father. He's written a new will. You and Jessica will get everything.

Lorenzo (Gasping): Oh!...Oh!...I can't speak!

Portia: Now we're all happy. *(Calls toward the house)* Musicians! *(The musicians come in.)* Something sweet for all these nice people *(Indicating the audience).*

(The musicians play something dreadful, such as a classical work played very badly. Director's choice. The curtain goes down with the music in progress.)

END

Posted on October 5, 2010 by Crad Kildney, Toronto, Canada.

(Index to the Series appears on — <https://cradkildney.wordpress.com/2010/10/07/>)